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DESERT VOICE



COMICS
ON
DUTY

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On the Cover Comics on Duty takes on Southwest Asia with a no-holds-barred assault on deployed military life.

Illustration by Sgt. Matt Millham

Head start for the long trip home

story by Spc. Brian Trapp

During the upcoming months the Central Command theater will see the largest troop movements since the rotation of forces approximately one year ago. As the 1st Infantry Division heads home, they have to move thousands of pieces of equipment and thousands of Soldiers out of Iraq and back to Germany. To lessen the impact of the division's redeployment on Kuwait they were given a head start.

"The Big Red One" is on pace to have about half of its equipment moved back to its, home stations before they transfer authority to the 42nd Infantry Division in mid February.

The division is pushing this equipment back as early retrograde. Early retrograde is equipment that commanders in the field deem as non-mission essential and decide to push back to redeploy early, before the division and before the bulk of the surge. Doing so will get the 1st ID troops home faster and alleviate the strain that a division's worth of equipment can put on Kuwait's washracks and redeployment camps.

So far, the 1st ID's early retrograde mission is a success, said Maj. Mark Yockey, 1st ID Coalition Forces Land Component Command liaison officer. "Redeploying these non-mission essential items makes it easier for the division to redeploy and relieves the strain on the theater's line-haul assets."

1st ID will send about 40 percent of its own equipment back as early retrograde. This equipment, combined with the already completed redeployment of the North Carolina National Guard's 30th Brigade Combat Team, from Clinton, N.C., which served under the 1st ID, sets up the division to have 50 percent of its equipment out of Iraq and heading home before February.

"When the division came over here, we essentially deployed everything," Yockey said. "We didn't know what kind of environment we'd be operating in."

"Last April the dynamic changed," he said. Some of the equipment the division shipped to Iraq at the end of 2003 wasn't needed, he admitted. "A lot of it was just parked."

Because so much of the gear has already been sent back to the rear, about 8,700 Soldiers, who would have had to drive vehicles back from Iraq, won't have to risk their lives one last time as they make their way to the safety of Kuwait. For about 1,200 1st ID Soldiers, it means a direct flight from Iraq to Germany.

"It's a win for everybody," Yockey said.



Soldiers with the 1st Infantry Division download an M113 Armored Personnel Carrier that was sent to Kuwait from Iraq as early retrograde earlier this month. photo courtesy of the 1st Infantry Division

"The Soldiers get a four-hour flight home rather than a 48-hour movement through already-strained camps in Kuwait."

The 1st ID transported the gear out over the course of several months. Starting in November, they used a method that helped more than just themselves. The 1st ID took advantage of the common user land transportation, or CULT, convoys to haul their gear to Kuwait.

The CULT is composed of theater owned military and commercial flatbeds, line-haul trucks and Heavy Equipment Transporters that are used to move military equipment that can't be driven in or out of theater, said Chief Warrant Officer Marcus Griffin, mobility officer with the 7th Transportation Group. Much of the equipment that is brought back by the CULT convoys is unarmored and can't be driven through hostile areas.

The CULT convoy resources are provided to units by prioritizing the needs for equipment in Iraq. After dropping off their loads in Iraq, CULT haulers can pick up early retrograde equipment and haul it to Kuwait. Using the CULT convoys in this way has helped to speed up the redeployment process.

"We're ahead of the game," said Griffin. "The early retrograde basically allows me to move 1st ID out of Iraq earlier."

Because of limited assets for convoy security escorts in theater for the CULT convoys, the 1st ID acted as security for the convoys both into and out of Iraq. They

escorted convoys hauling other units' equipment into Iraq, and then on the return movement loaded the trucks with 1st ID equipment and escorted the convoy back to Kuwait for redeployment.

"It made it easier for us because we could move up more equipment [to Iraq] and download that gear," Griffin said. Then the 1st ID used the same convoy to bring back its own gear, he said.

An average CULT convoy is made up of anywhere from 40 to 60 trucks. A convoy that size has the capacity to haul 80 containers of equipment or 80 unarmored, or 'soft-skin' vehicles into Kuwait, Yockey said.

"For every soft-skin vehicle we can line-haul south, that is a Soldier's risk mitigated," he said. "It's been a great team effort between the 7th Transportation Group and 1st ID to make sure we protect our force."

While the 30th BCT was redeploying out of theater earlier this month, the 1st ID continued to push early retrograde back to Kuwait. Once the BCT moved out and back to North Carolina to demobilize, there were 1,000 pieces of 1st ID equipment and vehicles backlogged and ready for either the washrack or to be loaded onto a ship.

Only the 1st ID's mission-essential equipment is still left in Iraq. When the 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division deploys in the coming months, the 1st ID expects to haul their remaining equipment back to Kuwait on the same trucks that haul the 3rd ID's equipment into Iraq.

Soldiers recover millions in lost cargo

story by Spc. Brian Trapp

Containers full of supplies and equipment, without a destination or lacking documentation, end up lost in the system from time to time. Like an animal shelter for Army supplies, Camp Arifjan's frustrated cargo yard, takes these containers with no home, documents them, enters them into the system and sees if an owner pops up or if there's someone else in theater who wants them.

The frustrated cargo mission, part of the Task Order 58 Container Yard, is putting millions of dollars worth of lost equipment back into the supply system.

"The containers are full of all types of undocumented stuff, things the Army has ordered and for some reason or another it didn't get to the customer and ended up back here," said Lt. Col. Cliff Hoppman, support operations officer with 43rd Area Support Group. "We return it to the supply system because it's sitting in the container, and it's not doing anyone any good there."

The operation started more than a month ago with 206 containers which were opened and the contents sorted. That phase ended Jan. 8, and now those on the job are in the

process of returning the equipment to warehouses. As of Jan. 14 about \$3.1 million worth of equipment had been catalogued, and the project is expected to continue for at least another month, Hoppman said.

Soldiers with the 251st Cargo Transfer Company and the 499th Quartermaster Company, both attached to the 43rd Area Support Group, are doing the bulk of the work. They work sunup to sundown opening each container, inventorying the contents and classifying the items to re-enter into the supply system. They moved through the containers at a pace of 10 to 15 a day, said Staff Sgt. Brandon Weaver, site supervisor with the 499th.

Each container was an unknown until the team of Soldiers cracked open the doors and saw what was waiting for them. Sometimes it was a jumble of wood and repair parts tossed together so haphazardly that it looked like the container was rolled over a couple times before arriving in the container yard. Sometimes it was full of high-tech aviation electronics with parts worth tens of thousands of dollars.

"We've been finding a lot of pretty high-end items, like laser sights for tanks and up

armor components," Weaver said. "It's unreal, the stuff and the condition we find it in. We don't get to keep it, but we send it where it needs to be."

"Every day is Christmas here," said Hoppman. "You don't know what you're going to get until you open the box."

The Soldiers find all types of equipment inside the containers; repair parts, construction materials, computers, radios valued at \$20,000 each, computers, Kevlar blankets and "enough batteries to power every toy in Wal-Mart," Hoppman said.

When the containers are opened up the Soldiers try to identify the contents by looking for national stock numbers or serial numbers and entering them into the supply system, to see if a flag pops up, said Lt. Col. Robert White, officer in charge of the Task Order 58 Yard and support operations officer with the 377th Theater Support Command. If someone requested it, it will come up, and then the equipment can be pushed forward to them or someone in theater.

The troops in the cargo yard are in a race against time. With the surge coming on, they will likely be pulled away for other duties until their time to redeploy in about a month.

Washrack capacity increases for surge

story by Spc. Brian Trapp

During this year's surge about 10,000 vehicles will roll through Kuwait's U.S. military washrack system in a span of 90 days. In one day, the combined capacity of the washracks can take 500 small wheeled vehicles, 120 heavy equipment transporters and 60 tracked vehicles.

To take on this extreme volume, the Army added two temporary washracks. One 40-point washrack is being leased from PWC for 90 days for \$2.4 million. For the other, the Army came to an agreement with the Kuwaiti army to borrow some land to set up a 32-point facility near Camp Victory.

It has been projected that more than 350 wash points are needed for the surge to avoid delays, said Capt. Randal Coble, washrack operations officer for Deployment-Redeployment Operations with the 377th Theater Support Command. In Kuwait, the U.S. military now has 262 wash points, and about 27 percent of those are temporary.

The land and pressure washers to run the PWC washrack are all rented or leased, and all but about 20 personnel at the facility are contract employees. Command and control of the operation, which sits a few miles north of Camp Arifjan, is handled by

16 Soldiers with the 945th Collection and Classification Company, a unit of the Delaware National Guard, which is under the 43rd Area Support Group. There is also a small dining facility, managed by two 43rd Soldiers, at the washrack.

For the second temporary washrack, Area Support Group-Kuwait negotiated to borrow land from the 35th Kuwait Armored Brigade. Unlike the PWC washrack, this one is completely Army operated, Coble said. About 35 Soldiers from the 146th Quartermaster Company, a Reserve unit from Queens, N.Y., which also falls under 43rd, will run this operation.

Last year, purchasing extra washrack space for this year's surge was not expected to be necessary, because of plans to build a 100-point washrack at Kuwaiti Naval Base, Coble said. The project was supposed to be complete before the surge began, but Kuwaiti approval is required to build the new washrack, said Coble.

When the KNB washrack opens, the plan is to close the 30-point washrack that is already operating at KNB. The new washrack will result in a net gain of 70 wash points at KNB. Even with the additional 70 points, Camp Doha's eventual closure means the U.S. military will lose the 80-

point washrack there. It's likely the military will have to lease or rent washrack space again in the future, Coble said.

Right now Camp Arifjan's washrack and the new PWC washrack are the only ones working at a 24-hour pace. Washrack operations can switch all the facilities to function 24-hours a day, Coble said, but the switch comes with a price. To switch Camp Doha's washrack to a 24-hour pace it would cost the Army an additional \$10,000 a day in overtime pay, he said.

Some units are upset at the inconvenience of not having 24-hour operations, Coble said. Coble said there are ways to get through the washrack system quicker, though, with 'opportunity washes.'

"Generally speaking units show up at (6 a.m.), but if they don't show up by (6:15 a.m.) with their washrack ticket, their spot goes to the next in line." If a unit lost an appointment it can try to jump in line and wait for an opening. The unit that shows up late is pushed to the back of the line for the day.

"It's the same concept as overbooking a hotel," Coble said. "When we overbook we know some units won't be able to get their vehicles down in time to meet their appointment. Units are encouraged to wait down there to absorb open slots."

That's how I spell relief

story and photo by Spc. Curt Cashour

In response to the Dec. 26 tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, the U.S. military is contributing help to the region in a variety of ways, offering supplies, equipment and thousands of servicemembers in support of Operation United Assistance, the military's official name for the relief effort.

Next door in Kuwait, which was physically unaffected by the disaster, hundreds of U.S. troops and civilians deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom have been doing their part in the aid effort as well, donating their extra time, effort and resources to help their Asian neighbors, who have lost nearly 160,000 people to date.

At Camp Buehring, more than 400 troops, many of whom were on their way to Iraq, participated in the Camp Buehring 5K Relief Run/Walk Jan. 8. The event allowed participants to show their support for tsunami victims by running or walking a 5-kilometer course and making donations to the American Red Cross tsunami relief fund, said 2nd Lt. Michelle Dittloff, one of the event's organizers and a member of the 448th Engineer Battalion, a Reserve unit from Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico.

The mood of the run was more carefree than competitive. Several folks were still signing up minutes after the 3 p.m. start time. Sgt. Anessa Cunningham lagged behind a few minutes, long enough to boast that her unit, the 319th Signal Battalion, a Reserve unit based in Sacramento, Calif., contributed exactly \$617. Dittloff said the event wasn't about who won or lost, but helping others.

"You can run, walk, stroll, skip – we just wanted as much participation as possible."

The event raised more than \$5,000, and all junior-enlisted participants received certificates of achievement worth five promotion points, said 2nd Lt. Terri Twombly, another event organizer and a member of the 317th Quartermaster Battalion, a Reserve unit headquartered in Lawrence, Kan.

The same day as the Buehring run, Col. John Olshefski put a \$2,731 check for tsunami relief efforts in the mail at Camp Arifjan. The check was the result of a four-day collection effort Olshefski started after getting the idea from one of his Soldiers, Capt. Jeff Shearin. Shearin relayed to Olshefski that, although troops in Kuwait are separated from their families, they don't have it nearly as bad as the tsunami vic-

tims, Olshefski said.

Olshefski, deputy of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command logistics section, mentioned the collection effort in a staff meeting, and the 100-or-so Soldiers under him did the rest, he said. The section's 30-man logistics automations group even donated \$1,500 on its own.

Sgt. Maj. Bobby Walden, of the logistics section and a member of the 377th Theater Support Command, knows what it feels like to be on both ends of a relief operation. She donated funds for this effort and was on the receiving end of a gift campaign started by friends and family after her house burned down in Pokoshee, Okla., 11 years ago. Back then, it made her feel good to know that people still cared. Nothing has changed this time around, she said.

"Hearts haven't been hardened by being here," she said.

Col. Tom Harvey, commander of the 595th Transportation Group at Kuwait's main military port, the Sea Port of Debarkation, contributed help in the form of five Soldiers and two Department-of-the-Army civilian port workers, he said.

The seven-man team, which had been working in port operations at the SPOD, departed Kuwait for Thailand Jan. 6 and 7 to help open three ports that will receive shipments of food, medical supplies, water purification systems and other equipment provided by the U.S. military, Harvey said.

Harvey said decisions to shift port workers from one deployed region to another are not uncommon and stem from the fact that the skills required to open ports are spread across a relatively small number of military personnel.

In addition to providing Soldiers for the relief efforts, Harvey also persuaded Maersk Sealand to donate a shipping container, which SPOD staff members are filling with a variety of food, hygiene and other relief supplies, to ship into Southeast Asia. The bulk of the supplies are coming from overstuffed care packages Soldiers received as Christmas gifts from their families, he said.

Collection efforts headed by the Kuwait chapter of the Masonic Family, a worldwide community assistance and relief organization, kicked off Jan. 15, said Mason Herbert Frink. Frink, a civilian contractor for the military, said the Kuwait chapter's membership includes native Kuwaitis and a number of civilian military-support workers.

Masonic Family members set up collection points for food, clothing and children's items at Camps Arifjan and Doha. After a



Sgt. David Brace speeds toward the finish line during the Camp Buehring 5K Relief Run/Walk Jan. 8. Brace finished first with a time of 16 minutes 34 seconds.

week's worth of collecting, the group will give the donations to the Sri Lankan, Indonesian and Indian embassies in Kuwait, Frink said.

With the help of the Army Materiel Command's Lt. Col. Scott Fletcher, it took Frink and fellow Mason Calvin Corley Jr. about two weeks to get permission for the collection effort and ensure it didn't violate Army regulations, according to Frink and Corley. Now that he knows the proper procedures, Frink said he hopes to mount a future collection effort to aid foreign national workers, some of whom had family members affected by the tsunami, at Kuwait's U.S. military camps.

"I don't want to shine, I just want to help people," Frink said.

Want to donate? Check out the information below or visit www.whitehouse.gov and click on the Tsunami-Relief link.

Kuwait Masonic Family

Herbert Frink (cell) 916-3059

Calvin Corley (cell) 660-5148

The American Red Cross

ATTN: Tsunami Relief Fund

PO Box 97089

Washington D.C. 20090-7089

1-800-435-7669

DSN: 430-4444

www.redcross.org



No topic is safe when five comedians tackle military life in Southwest Asia

story and photos by Spc. Brian Trapp

Hundreds of Soldiers braved the cold Thursday night to watch Comics On Duty. Troops quickly filled the seats outside of Camp Arifjan's Zone 1 PX, and more stood on the fringes of the crowd for nearly two hours to watch a handful of comics crack jokes about everything from the ban on alcohol to the messages in the portable toilets. The crowd rolled with laughter and seemed glad to have the chance to forget where they were, relax and have a good time.

"It's good to be here," said Warren B Hall. "All comics say that, but it really is good to be here. The last place I was in was Fallujah; it is good to be *here*."

The comics regularly tour the Central Command Theater, and when they do, they live where Soldiers do, eat where the Soldiers do and go to the same bathrooms Soldiers do, all of which helps generate a lot of material for them.

They do all of this because they want to thank the Soldiers, said Richard Davis, the tour's executive producer.

"I feel like [the military] are the super bowl champions, and we're the water boys. We just want to be a part of it and support it," said Gary Brightwell, one of the comics on the tour.

Comics On Duty is not a comic troop; they're just standup comedians. All of the comics are headliner acts with some television time. Although they're not household names and probably wouldn't be filling stadiums back in the states, they put on a great show for the troops.



Warren B Hall, the opening comic for the Comics On Duty tour, demonstrates what men don't realize they shouldn't be touching in public. The nine-country 31-day tour stopped at three Kuwaiti camps including Thursday night's stop at Camp Arifjan. The tour is sponsored by Armed Forces Entertainment.

Camp Arifjan was just one of the stops on the team's nine-country, 31-day tour. In Kuwait, they were also scheduled to perform at Camp Victory and Ali Al Saleem. Comics on Duty, affiliated with Armed Forces Entertainment, is a low-budget show compared to the bigger-ticket United Service Organization shows, Davis said.

"The cost of putting one of the big-name USO shows up in some 5-star hotel for a few nights is probably the same cost of our whole tour," he said. "We're bunking in Doha and eating in the DFACs. No one is getting fame and fortune out of this."

The tour has performed for audiences ranging anywhere from 2,000 troops in Iraq to just 12 people, said Brightwell, who opened for Dennis Miller at MGM Grand's big room in Las Vegas before he came out to perform for troops in parking lots and tents across Southwest Asia.

Steve Eblin, one of the performers, said he wanted the troops to take away a little relaxation from the show. "It's a couple hours of forgetting where they are and a little piece of home," Eblin said.

During his act, Eblin brought up how when he was 18 he wanted to join the mili-



Steve Eblin gives his share of the nearly two-hour show put on by five headliner comedians. A large crowd gathered in the parking lot outside of Camp Arifjan's Zone 1 PX despite chilly temperatures.



Richard Davis, the tour's executive producer, right, and the comics handed out autographed flyers and Comics On Duty patches. Then, they spent a few minutes talking with the troops once the crowd thinned out.



Dave Mishevitz presents his unique style of comedy. The comics performed three shows in Kuwait as part of their 'Back to the Stans tour,' which also included shows in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in shows in Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain and Djibouti.

tary, but because of a technical medical condition he wasn't allowed to join. "The problem was, I'm a [sissy]," he said.

When he was telling his friends that he was going on tour to Afghanistan, they were asking him if he was afraid. "I told them no," Eblin said. "There's no safer place than behind 6,000 dudes with guns. The second reason, I wasn't [afraid] is because I saw the Al Qaeda training video . . . I mean my daughter can swing on the monkey bars upside down by her legs. Does that mean she could be their leader?"

Hall opened the show as the first act and got the crowd going, doubling some of the audience members over. He talked about things that everyone can relate to like, riding motorcycles, friends that do drugs, tattoos, getting into trouble with his girlfriend, pornography addictions, getting beaten by his mother with a toaster oven and attending a wedding at a nudist colony.

All of the comics did some bathroom humor, but it was literally about the bathrooms that they've seen and had to use. They joked about everything from the plastic phone booth, to the porta-potty wall mes-

sage boards and the Barbie-Dream-House-sized toilet paper in some camps.

Even with five comics, each had a unique style. "Everyone was completely different," said Staff Sgt. Travis Bowen, a maintenance squad leader with the 233rd Transportation Company. "They weren't all up there doing the same thing.

Bowen came to the show because he didn't have anything else to do and because of boredom, he said. Bowen did walk away with a smile on his face and said the show was "hilarious."

After each comic's set was over, they spent some time thanking the crowd for their service, which had the unfortunate effect of cooling off the crowd for the next performer.

"I want to say thank you," Hall said. "It's funny, because a lot of people come up after the show and thank us, but I see it the other way around. If you didn't do what you do, I couldn't keep on doing this."

At the end of his time on stage, Connolly took time to let the Soldiers know how the comics feel about coming out to support the troops. "I appreciate the job you do. If I did what you guys do, with no alcohol and barely any women in this place, I would snap in a week," he said.

The thank you did seem heartfelt, and the crowd felt it.

It's strange when the troops say thank you, Bowen said. "We're over here just doing our job, and they remind us that we're appreciated and have a purpose here."

"I appreciate the job you do. If I did what you guys do, with no alcohol and barely any women in this place, I would snap in a week." — Tom Connolly, comic

The Comics On Duty program has been around for 13 years and has performed more than 1,500 shows worldwide. This is the 14th tour for the program and fifth to Southwest Asia. It was also the fourth time they performed at Camp Arifjan. The program actually started as a United States-based touring program, but it began touring overseas in 2001.

The Savivors

story and photo by Spc. Aimee Felix

When Spain dropped out of the coalition supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, all but one of the Latin American countries still in the coalition followed suit. By May of last year, the only Latin American force left was a Salvadoran contingent, the second rotation of troops from the country. Two rotations later, they are still around supporting OIF.

Lt. Ernesto Cristales explained this with pride as the rest of his troops nodded in agreement. Cristales is the commander of the advance party for the third rotation of Salvadoran troops. Stationed at Camp Virginia since Jan. 3, the advance party will in-process the fourth rotation of Salvadoran troops before meeting back up with the rest of the third rotation when they redeploy from Iraq. In early February, the third rotation will head home after six months in Iraq.

The pride of being the last Latin American nation serving in the coalition was a driving force for the third rotation in Iraq,

Salvadoran facts

El Salvador means "the savior" in Spanish.

El Salvador's climate is tropical on the coast and temperate in the uplands.

El Salvador is the smallest, but most densely populated country in Central America.

El Salvador has 25 volcanoes, and it has frequent and sometimes very destructive earthquakes and volcanic activity. It is also extremely susceptible to hurricanes. El Salvador's Independence Day is Sept. 15, and it became independent in 1821. El Salvador adopted the U.S. dollar as its currency.

Archaeologists estimate that the first settlements in the El Salvador's Mayan Ruins of Tazumal date back to around 5000 B.C.

Local wildlife includes rare spider monkeys, two-fingered anteaters, pumas, agoutis, toucans and striped owls.

El Salvador's major industries include textiles, coffee, sugar, beverages, petroleum, chemicals, fertilizer, furniture, light metals and cotton.

El Salvador is the only Latin American country without environmental laws. Some Salvadoran foods include casamiento, a mixture of rice and beans; pupusas, a cornmeal mass stuffed with farmer's cheese; and chicharron, fried pork fat.



Soldier Mauricio Hernandez, a member of El Salvador's redeploying rotation's advance party writes a letter to his mother Jan. 11 while at Camp Virginia, Kuwait.

"even though we were 12,800 kilometers from home," said Cristales right before going into a nostalgic tangent about the mountains of El Salvador.

Cristales' short mission in Kuwait is small compared to the mission he and his troops had in Iraq with the rest of the Third Cuscatlan Battalion, as the third rotation is known. The battalion, like all the battalions sent by El Salvador for OIF, are created specifically for these deployments, and they consist of a combination of at least six military occupation specialties. Among them are military policemen, civil engineers, anti-terrorist specialists, special forces, cavalrymen and infantrymen. Each battalion is capable of carrying out almost any military task, said Cristales, who added that that was the Salvadoran army's intent when creating the units for the Iraq mission.

The battalions deploy for six months at a time to Al Hillah, Iraq, and their responsibilities range from prison security to negotiating contracts for assorted reconstruction efforts. "If [Multinational Division Central-South] needed something to be done, we wanted to be able to do it," said Cristales.

Most of the troops in the advance party were military policemen. They, together with the rest of the MPs still in Iraq, made up the entire security force for the military prison in Al Hillah. The MPs also guarded the Salvadoran perimeter in Camp Charlie, manned check points and traffic control points, and conducted pre-convoy patrols to make sure there were no explosives on the convoy route. "They did whatever they could to provide security for any coalition soldier traveling through the convoy routes,"

said Cristales.

One of the troops who ensured this security was Soldier Ovidio Franco (whose rank is equivalent to an American E1). For Franco and all of the other troops in the advance party this was the first deployment outside of El Salvador. Franco said the experience tested his valor like it had never been tested before. As an MP, Franco often served as one of the escorts for convoys traveling through Iraq. In his eight years in the military, Franco said he had never before felt the way he felt the few times his convoys were shot at. "But I chose this, and I came prepared for it as did all my peers," he said.

Cavo Wilbert Rodezno (whose rank is equivalent to an American E4) also worked as an MP, but mostly for the prison. Rodezno said transporting the prisoners was sometimes scary, but "thank god I had no serious conflicts," he said. Rodezno talked about how honored he was to participate in the global cause of fighting terrorism. He said this in a tone that confirmed that pride was the running theme of the troops in the advanced party. Even more important to him was that by volunteering for this mission he was setting a good example for his 3-and 5-year-old daughters, he said.

According to the three men, their families and the citizens of El Salvador are extremely proud of their troops' support.

"We stayed [in the coalition] when we had the chance to leave, and we did so for good, so I'm sure there will be a fifth, a sixth and a seventh rotation as long as they need us," said Cristales.

An artist among us

story by Sgt. Matt Millham

Perhaps the most misleading thing about Lt. Col. Michael Verrett is his laid-back demeanor, because he's not laid back. Verrett's 25 years on the Baton Rouge, La., police department, his 29 years in the Army Reserve, his hundreds if not thousands of hours of volunteer work, and his prolific writing and drawing all hide effortlessly behind his easy smile.

But it's not that the smile is a ruse. It's not that his happiness isn't genuine. It's just hard to imagine this seemingly happy-go-lucky guy as the same man who, during his years as a detective in Louisiana, racked up several death-penalty convictions in cases he helped solve. It's hard to see this guy telling off his boss, which according to a longtime friend of his, Donna Britt, he's been known to do.

"He might tell you he's laid back, but Mike is very driven," said Britt, an anchorwoman for CBS affiliate WAFB TV in Baton Rouge. "The things he chooses to do for leisure are things you and I might consider work."

So when he retired from the Baton Rouge police force in April last year and was called up to active duty in the Army Reserve just two months later, he took it all in stride. "If he's got to do work, Verrett finds a way to make it fun," said Britt. "His outlook is almost always upbeat."

Britt's assessment of Verrett really seems to hold true. As a man who lives life as a lesson to pass on to others, Verrett passed on this parable, a sort of shortened version of his life story. "Many of us joined the military not because it was our first choice, because most of us have skills in many other areas, but the military of course provides us many opportunities," he began.

"The police department wasn't my first choice, but I needed a job. One of the things I tell kids, just because you couldn't do what you wanted to do doesn't mean you can't be a success. And besides, I do this, the police department, and I'm still able to do artwork and share it with people," he said as he scribbled out a single-panel comic with uncanny speed.

He isn't upset about being called up out of his still-new retirement to work as the Coalition Forces Land Component Command container manager for CFLCC's logistics section. He joked that he wasn't retired for long enough to really get a feel for retirement anyway. His wife and three teenage sons didn't want to see Verrett leave, but when asked about his father's

call-up during an interview in Baton Rouge, Verrett said his 14-year-old son told the reporter, "I don't want my dad to have to go, but we don't want another 9/11."

"I've got three great kids," said Verrett. "My wife on the other hand was hoping [my call-up] was a joke."

After his retirement from the police force, Pelican Publishing picked Verrett up as an illustrator, but for some reason, he didn't retire from the Reserve.

"All of us go through a period where we think, you know, maybe it's time to hang it up," he said. "It's the dedication to duty more than anything else that generation upon generations have made the ultimate sacrifice, and all they're asking me to do is be vigilant."

This is only a glimpse of the real Verrett. Another part donates years-worth of free time to teach art and creative writing to children. Then there's the Verrett who lectured on investigations for the U.S. Attorney's Office, and Verrett the police sketch artist. But it's all part of the same man — a guy whose mind is forever churning out new ideas and finding new ways of looking at things. In there, since he was a child, is the Verrett who draws and dreams of being a Disney artist.

After 15 years on the police force, Verrett got his first chance to get paid for his art as a police sketch artist.

"Well, they knew I could do artwork, so they asked me if I'd start drawing the bad guys' faces," he said.

So in 1996 he took a two-week course on being a police sketch artist. It wasn't long before he was invited to what is probably the most exclusive police sketch artist course in the world, a once-a-year, invite-only course limited to 20 people given by the FBI, said Verrett.

What's sort of bizarre about this is that he says it as he's drawing a picture of, what he calls, a puppy dog. It looks like a puppy dog. He's working on this same sketch as he talks about his several death penalty convictions. Britt helped to put this juxtaposition into perspective.

"I've known Mike Verrett probably around 20 years," said Britt. "He was a powerhouse of a homicide detective when he started popping up in our news over and over again. Verrett's attention to detail and down-home friendliness would often disarm

people who were trying to lie to him. I suspect they mistook his easy-going manner for lower intelligence and greatly underestimated him. In doing so, crooks said too much and dug themselves deeper in trouble."

Britt became familiar with Verrett through his work as a police detective long before he began sketching for the police department. Before he started sketching the faces of criminals, though, he began volunteering uncountable hours in the Baton Rouge

school system. His volunteerism earned him the distinction in 2003 of being the top volunteer over a 10-year period in the East Baton Rouge school district, where he paints murals and teaches art and creative writing to elementary school children.

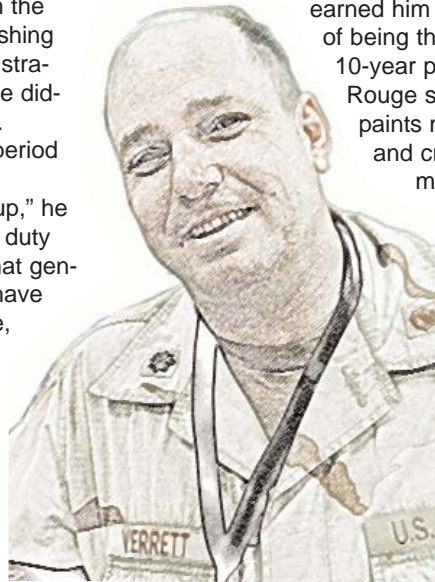
It was through an art project at the district's Cedarcrest Southmoor Elementary School that Verrett first met Jan Smith, the school's librarian. Another teacher approached Smith and told her that Verrett was willing to paint a mural on the library wall "in

exchange for paint and diet coke," said Smith. "Two years and a thousand diet cokes later, he completed his project; he painted 27 out of 30 panels featuring over 25 children's stories." She said he spent somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 hours on the murals.

Though the most well-known of his artworks are those he creates within the walls of schools and interrogation rooms, his desire to spread art pours out wherever he goes in such a prolific way that almost everyone he comes in contact with can't help but be touched by him.

"If he is in a restaurant, he will draw a picture on a napkin for a kid," said Smith. "It is impossible to guess how many napkin drawings are hanging on kids' bulletin boards across the state."

Since arriving in Kuwait in September last year, Verrett has written four short stories and drawn an uncountable number of comics and illustrations. He's perpetually looking for interesting stories in everyday life, and a lot of that is reflected in his comics, which often appear on the back page of this magazine. "Things we do as Soldiers are remarkable that nobody will ever see," said Verrett, "but if you take the time to listen and watch what's going on and take note of it, then you learn something yourself. It might be something that can make its way into a book one day."



Celebrate Dr. King

by Sgt. 1st Class Timothy J. Clausen
43d Area Support Group

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia on Jan. 15, 1929. Dr. King was a leader of the Black Civil Rights Movement and a minister. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn. on April 4, 1968 as he addressed a crowd of striking sanitation workers and their supporters.

In observance of Dr. King's birthday, President Ronald Reagan declared the third Monday in January a legal public holiday, when he signed Public Law 98-144 on Nov. 2, 1983.

The Martin Luther King Jr. holiday became a powerful and important means for attaining Dr. King's dream of a non-violent nation in a non-violent world, which he referred to as "The Beloved Community" and "World House." The holiday demonstrates its potential power for changing people's

behavior and attitudes by inspiring them to embrace a cause greater than themselves, to assist others in need, and to internalize the values of love, tolerance and non-violence.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission encourages Americans to observe the Dr. King holiday – not only on the third Monday of each January, but every day of the year. In doing so, we may remember how non-violent action was used in America as the genesis for positive social change. We may also celebrate the life and work of Dr. King, the non-violent struggle he led and those who were part of the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, we may act to improve our families and communities, the nation and the world.

At the heart of Dr. King's philosophy was the concept of service. "That everybody can be great, because anybody can serve ... that one of the best ways to achieve peace and civil unity is for people to help others however they can, every day."

NTV safety is not a choice

by Spc. Aimee Felix

Stressing non-tactical vehicle safety may seem like overkill, but so is the number of NTV accidents in Kuwait.

According to the Camp Arifjan Provost Marshal Office, there were 500 NTV accidents in Kuwait between March and December 2004.

Among the types of accidents that occur in the Central Command theater of operations, the top three are all vehicle related, said Lt. Col. Pete Winston, safety officer for the 143rd Transportation Command Safety Office.

"There's a lot of people here with vehicles who shouldn't have any," said Camp Arifjan Military Police Officer Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey Wilson. Wilson added that too many people with NTVs have off-post memos.

While an overpopulation of NTVs may be a reason for the number of accidents, the real problem is how fast these vehicles are being driven, said Wilson.

Kuwait is not the place to think 'When in Rome do as the Romans do,' said Jesse Martin, 18th Airborne Corps safety civilian. "Stick to the way you learned how to drive," he said. And "drive the speed limit," said Wilson, who also advises NTV drivers to drive defensively, not offensively, in Kuwait.

Other reasons contributing to the number

of NTV accidents in Kuwait are severe weather conditions, like sandstorms and heavy rain, and not conducting regular preventive maintenance checks and services. "When you don't use wipers 10 out of 12 months, you should probably check to make sure they actually work," said Winston, who added that checking the tread depth on tires is very important in the wet season.

In addition to risking their lives, if NTV drivers in Kuwait still choose not to drive safely, they will risk losing their license. All it takes is two speeding tickets or one reckless driving ticket for someone to lose their license here, said Wilson.

"People think that once they leave camp they're safe," said Wilson. But Col. Brick T. Miller, Area Support Group-Kuwait commander, has directed MPs to follow speeding NTV drivers onto and off the camps and give them tickets, said Wilson. The MPs will often give NTV drivers tickets outside of their jurisdiction. "Hey, it's command directed," said Wilson explaining that Miller has also given the MPs permission to give tickets off post. "Col. Miller will go out there himself sometimes and give out tickets," said Wilson.

Now that a few of the PMOs in Kuwait have gotten more vehicles, all with radar capability, MPs can better track speeding drivers and, as Wilson hopes, decrease the number of accidents in Kuwait.

Safety Corner

Fire prevention

from the 377th Theater Support Command
Safety Office

Fire is a major safety concern. In order to prevent fires in tents and dormitories, a few simple rules must be followed. No stoves, hot plates, microwaves, irons, or any other types of cooking devices are authorized. There are no exceptions. Even though the PX sells these items, they are not allowed to be used in tents or dormitories. Also do not piggyback or daisy chain power strips. Test smoke alarms monthly, and visually check fire extinguishers monthly. The gauge on the fire extinguishers should be in the green area. Don't block exits with wall lockers, tables or anything else.

For more information contact the 377th TSC Safety Cell's Maj. Phelps at 430-6113 or 1st Lt. Surgi at 430-5414.

Finance snafu

by Spc. Aimee Felix

Because of a clerical error at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 4,000 troops in Kuwait will have to give back hundreds of dollars each to Uncle Sam.

In all the error caused about 53,000 troops to be overpaid in their January mid-month pay. Of those, 4,000 Soldiers are in Kuwait, said Lt. Col. Kellie Crespo, with the 374th Finance Battalion.

The error occurred because the year 2004 was entered into a database instead of 2005 when DFAS was calculating the new 2005 rates for basic allowance for subsistence. The error caused the computer system to retroactively apply the new rate to all of 2004, erroneously sending thousands of Soldiers anywhere from 200 to 500 dollars in back pay, said Col. Kenneth Crowder, director of Army Pay Operations for DFAS. Soldiers are encouraged not to spend the extra money.

The 4,000 Soldiers affected in Kuwait were overpaid between \$200 and \$300 each. The overpayment will be reflected in these troops' mid-month pay and will then be deducted from the Soldiers' end-of-month pay. For Soldiers who only get paid once a month, both the overpayment and the deduction will be reflected in their end-of-month Leave and Earnings Statement.

DFAS has notified the affected Soldiers through their Army Knowledge Online accounts and through their chain of command. Also, local finance units have a listing of all the overpaid Soldiers.

Community

happenings for Jan. 19 through Jan. 26

Arifjan

Wednesday

Bingo Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching 8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., High/Low Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 gym tent
Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent

Thursday

Spinning Class, 5:30 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent
Country Music Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Open Mic Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area
Karate Class, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR area

Friday

Open Mic Night, 7:30 p.m., MWR stage
Outdoor theater night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 MWR tent
Salsa Night, 7 p.m., Community Center
Step Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 2 gym tent

Saturday

R&B night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR tent
Country Western Night, 7:30 p.m., Zone 6 MWR tent
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching 8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., Combat Kick Boxing 3 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent

Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool

Sunday

Hula Bowl, 3 a.m., Community Center
NFL/NFC Championship, 11:30 p.m., Community Center
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Bench/Step Workout 5:30 a.m., Super Abs 8 a.m., Power Stretching 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., Bench/Step Workout 3 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent

Monday

NFL/AFC Championship, 2:30 a.m., Community Center
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching 8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., Combat Kick Boxing 3 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent
Aerobics, 6 p.m., Zone 6 gym tent

Tuesday

PS2 Tournament, 7 p.m., Community Center
Lap swimming, 5 to 7 a.m., pool
Bench/Step Workout 5:30 a.m., Super Abs 8 a.m., Power Stretching 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., Bench/Step Workout 3 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent

Wednesday

Ballroom Dancing Lesson, 7 p.m., Community Center
Combat Kick Boxing 5:30 a.m., Power Stretching 8 a.m., Bench/Step Workout 10 a.m., Body Pump Workout 1 p.m., High/Low Aerobics, 7 p.m., Zone 1 gym tent

For more information call 430-1202

Buehring

Wednesday

Spades Tournament, 7 p.m., Bunker

For more information call 828-1340

Doha

Wednesday

Over 40 basketball signups cutoff
Ladies Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Thursday

Racquetball signups cutoff
Bingo Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

Saturday

Tournament Madness, 7 p.m. Frosty's

Sunday

NFL/NFC Championship, 11:30 p.m., Frosty's

Monday

Heart's Tournament, 7 p.m., Frosty's
NFL/AFC Championship, 2:30 a.m., Frosty's

Wednesday

Rock 'n Roll Music Night, 7 p.m., Frosty's

For more information call 438-5637

Kuwaiti Naval Base

Wednesday

Self Defense 1, 6 p.m., aerobics room
Foosball Tournament, 7 p.m., new gym

Thursday

Texas Hold'em Poker, 7 p.m., new gym
Techno Dance, 7:30 p.m., old temp. gym tent

Friday

Bowling, 4 p.m., bowling alley
Latin Dance, 7 p.m., old temp. gym tent
Basketball Tournament, 8 p.m., Kuwaiti gym

Saturday

Tennis Tournament, 4 p.m., side of Kuwaiti gym
Ping Pong Tournament, 6 p.m., new gym
Softball, 6 p.m., next to soccer field
R&B Dance, 7 p.m., old temp. gym tent

Sunday

Ultimate Football, noon, Kuwaiti soccer field
Flag Football, 2 p.m., Kuwaiti soccer field
Self Defense 2, 7:30 p.m., aerobics room
NFL, 9 p.m., 12 a.m., gym/MWR tent

Monday

Marine Corp Martial Arts, 1 p.m., TMC
Darts Tournament, 6 p.m., gym
Chess/Spades/Checkers/Dominoes, 6 p.m., gym
Bowling, 7 p.m., bowling alley

Tuesday

PS2 Tournament, 5 p.m., new gym
Self Defense 1, 6 p.m., aerobics room
Chess/Spades/Checkers/Dominoes, 6 p.m., new gym
Self Defense 2, 7:30 p.m., aerobics room
Country Western Dance, 8 p.m., old temp. gym tent

Wednesday

Self Defense 1, 6 p.m., aerobics room
Foosball Tournament, 7 p.m., new gym

For more information call 839-1009

Navistar

Friday

Talent Show MWR tent, 7 p.m., MWR tent

For more information call 844-1138

Spearhead/SPOD

Friday

SPOD social dance, 9 p.m. to midnight, DFAC
For more information call 825-1302

Victory

Thursday

Bingo, 7 p.m., MWR tent

For more information call 823-1033

Virginia

Wednesday

Billiards-Singles Tournament, 6 p.m., MWR tent

Thursday

Spades Tournament, 6 p.m., Dusty Room

Friday

Ping Pong Tournament Night, 6 p.m., Dusty Room

Saturday

Spa Day, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., MWR tent

Sunday

Checkers Tournament, 3 p.m., MWR tent

Monday

Foosball Tournament, 6 p.m., MWR tent

Tuesday

Jeopardy Night or Unit Feud 6:30 p.m., Dusty Room

Wednesday

Chess Tournament, 3 p.m., MWR tent

For more information call 832-1045

Indoor soccer

Who? Anyone interested in playing.

What? 20-minute or three-goal

games between five-member teams with at least one female each.

When? Every Sunday from 8 a.m. to noon.

Where? Camp Arifjan Zone 1 gym's basketball court.

For more information call Sgt. 1st Class Omar Lugo at DSN 430-7033.

Doha/Arifjan Shuttle Schedule

Departs Doha Stop 1*	Arrives Doha Stop 2*	Departs Doha Stop 2*	Arrives Arifjan	Departs Arifjan	Arrives Doha
	0700	0715	0830	0545	
1015	1025	1040	1200	0845	1000
1445	1450	1505	1615	1300	1430
1900	1910	1925	2045	1630	1745

* Stop 1 is behind the Building 6 PAX Tent
Stop 2 is between Buildings 28 and 31

Doha/Al Salem Bus Schedule

Departs AAS	Arrives Doha	Departs Doha	Arrives AAS
		0615	0745
		0815	0945
0800	0930	0945	1115
1000	1130	1245	1415
1130	1300	1415	1545
1430	1600	1615	1745
1600	1730	1745	1915
1800	1930	1945	2115
1930	2100	2115	2245
2130	2300	0015	0145
2300	0030	0145	0315
0200	0330	0445	0615
0330	0500		
0630	0800		

The fallen heroes

by Staff Sgt. Wanda Carrasquillo,
81st Regional Support Command

Young and strong from the west, the wind brings them to the east as giants with their warrior plates and valor to fight a war no one else cares ...

They left their heavens to lie in hell as they reached land giving all they have with their partners in war ...

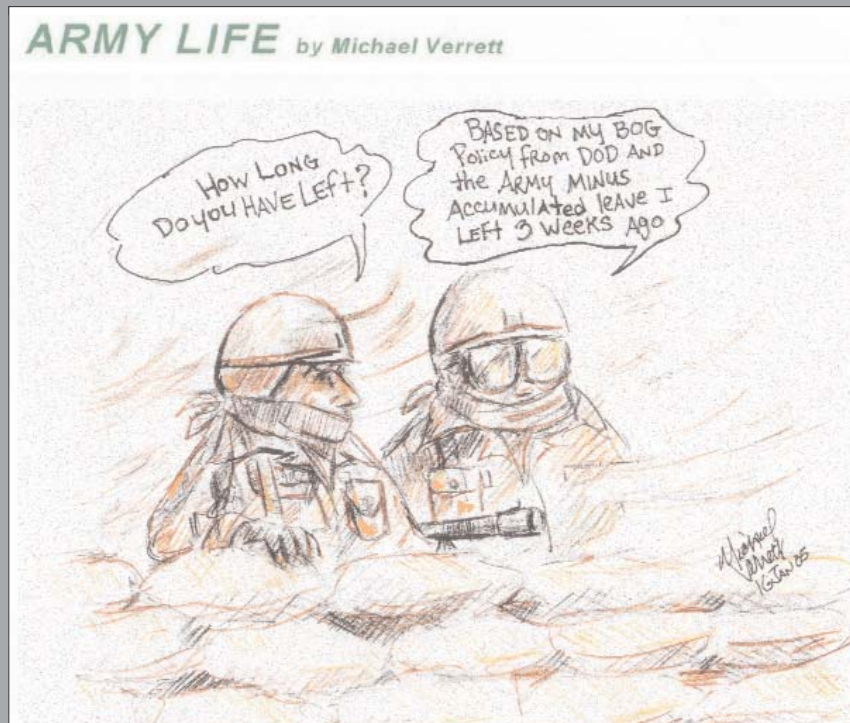
The spilled of their young blood in a land and culture not understood and confused different from their own, hoping their sacrifices would make a difference worldwide ...

But not only did they come for maintaining stability and peace but they fought to bring down the threat from the east of the leaders who dare to threaten the homeland security of the west ...

These are the true eagle warriors that the country will not forget ...

So young they gave up their lives in combat and their sacrifices are recognized and honored among those true brotherly Soldiers that fought next to them, understanding the pain of their fallen heroes. Only a true hero can share such a loss ...

The wind carry their ashes back to the west to rest and wait until they will join their spirit once again ...



by Capt. Paul Nichols, 377th Theater Support Command training officer



DESERT VOICE

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